



Rapid transportation allows many tourists to experience the wonders of previous civilizations, such as those at Cambodia's Angkor Wat (left) and Peru's Machu Picchu (right). Such World Heritage Sites dramatically illustrate the ethical dilemma of balancing the positive outcomes of tourism with the practical realities of site destruction.

culture and gain the motivation, acquire the knowledge, and develop the skills to function within that culture in an interculturally competent way.

### WRITING PROMPT

#### Reflecting on Your Tourist Experiences

Think about the culturally different places and countries that you have been as a visitor/tourist. Describe the kinds of intercultural contact you had with the cultural group(s) in the places or countries you visited. What effects might the tourists have had on that specific cultural group?

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## 12.2: The Ethics of Intercultural Competence

Those who attempt to achieve intercultural competence must face a number of ethical dilemmas. It is imperative to explore the following issues to become aware of the choices that are made all too often without due consideration and reflection.

There are three key ethical dilemmas:

1. The first is summarized in the adage "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."
2. The second asks if it is possible to judge a particular belief, value, norm, or social practice as morally reprehensible. If so, when and under what circumstances? Stated in a slightly different way, if all cultures have differing beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, does that mean there are no true rights and wrongs?

3. The third dilemma relates to the consequences of intercultural contacts. Are they necessarily positive for individuals and their societies? In other words, should all intercultural contacts be encouraged?

✓ By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- 12.2.1: Explain the dilemma of determining which communicating party should adapt to the other's cultural patterns
- 12.2.2: Explain the dilemma of whether or not it is ever acceptable to judge a culture based on radically different cultural patterns
- 12.2.3: Explain the dilemma of whether or not all intercultural contacts are positive and should be encouraged, in any circumstances
- 12.2.4: Describe guiding principles for developing your own personal code of ethics

### 12.2.1: When in Rome . . .

**OBJECTIVE:** Explain the dilemma of determining which communicating party should adapt to the other's cultural patterns

A fundamental issue confronting those who are in the midst of another culture is a decision about how much they should change their behaviors to fit the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices of those with whom they interact.

- Whose responsibility is it to attempt to take into account cultural differences in communication?
- Is it the responsibility of the visitors, newcomers, or sojourners to adjust their behaviors to the cultural

framework of the host culture, or should members of the host culture adjust their communication and make allowances for the newcomers and strangers?

- Because English predominates in the United States, are all those who live in the United States required to use English?
- To what extent must individuals adapt their cultural beliefs, values, norms, and social practices to the dominant cultural patterns?

The old saying “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” which clearly places the responsibility for change on the newcomer, offers a great deal of wisdom, but it cannot be followed in all circumstances. In most cases, behaviors that conform to cultural expectations show respect for the other culture and its ways. Conformity with common cultural practices also allows the newcomer to interact with and meet people from the host culture on some kind of genuine basis. Respecting differences in nonverbal and verbal codes means that the ethical intercultural communicator takes responsibility for learning as much about these codes as is possible and reasonable. Naturally, what is possible and reasonable will vary, depending on a range of circumstances. Sometimes, wholesale adoption of new cultural practices by a group of newcomers may be seen as disrespectful and can upset those from the host culture. In the past, for example, U.S. and European students visiting India wore Indian clothes, didn’t wear shoes, and lived in very poor circumstances. Many Indians regarded this “conforming” behavior as insulting and disrespectful of their cultures. The visitor to a culture cannot simply adopt the beliefs and practices of a new culture without also risking being perceived as insincere and superficial.

Sometimes it is difficult for people to change their behaviors to match cultural patterns that contradict their own beliefs and values. For example, many U.S. American women, who were taught to value freedom and equality, may find it difficult to respond positively to cultural practices that require women to wear veils in public and to use male drivers or chaperones. The ethical dilemma that intercultural communicators face is the decision about how far to go in adapting their behaviors to another culture:

- Should people engage in behaviors that they regard as personally wrong or difficult?
- At what point do people lose their own sense of self, their cultural identities, and their moral integrity?
- At what point does the adoption of new cultural behaviors offend and insult others?

One of the challenges and delights of intercultural communication is in discovering the boundaries and touchstones of one’s own moral perspective while simultaneously learning to display respect for other ways of dealing with human problems.

### Culture Connections

For his overall impression of Bangalore was chaos. The new technology that was to revolutionize and improve life, speed up communications between people and continents, had a back side that appeared in a clearer light. He had sensed this before, all puffed-up successes in the IT industry, all castles in the sky that had been built up and collapsed, and then the short memories of people as new bubbles were blown up.

They said the future was being built in Bangalore. Was this what it was supposed to look like? Was this the price we were supposed to pay? Or “we,” he thought as he walked quickly through the avenue of mango trees, it is all of these stressed Indians with their exhaust-induced coughs who will pay the highest price. Was it progress that more and more could ride motorcycles in a country where hundreds and millions had to struggle for their day-to-day survival?

—Kjell Eriksson

Another perspective from which to explore the ethical issues embedded in the adage is that of the “Romans.” A common point of view, often expressed by U.S. Americans about those who have recently immigrated to the United States or who still retain many of the underlying patterns of their own culture, is that since these people now live in the United States, they should adjust to its cultural ways. The same comments are often made about students from other countries who come to the United States to study.

We ask you to consider the experiences of those people who immigrate to or study in another country. Perhaps you are such a person. Or perhaps your parents or grandparents did so. Not all immigrants or students have freely chosen the country where they now reside. Large numbers of people migrate from one country to another because political, military, and economic upheavals in their own country make living and learning there nearly impossible. For many, the choice to leave is juxtaposed against a choice to die, to starve, or to be politically censored. We also ask you to consider how difficult it must be for people to give up their culture.

### WRITING PROMPT

#### Reflecting on Your Own Cultural Framework

Remember how fundamental your cultural framework is, how it provides the logic for your behavior and your view of the world. How easy would it be for you if you were forced into new modes of behavior? Adjustment to another culture is difficult.

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## 12.2.2: Are Cultural Values Relative or Universal?

**OBJECTIVE:** Explain the dilemma of whether or not it is ever acceptable to judge a culture based on radically different cultural patterns

A second ethical issue confronting the intercultural communicator is whether it is ever acceptable to judge the people of a culture when their behaviors are based on a radically different set of beliefs, values, norms, and social practices:

- Are there any values that transcend the boundaries of cultural differences?
- Are there any universally right or wrong values?

A culturally relativistic point of view suggests that every culture has its own set of values and that judgments can be made only within the context of the particular culture. Most people do not completely subscribe to this view, partly because it would lead to a lack of any firm beliefs and values on which to build a sense of self-identity.

David Kale suggests that there are two central values that transcend all cultures:

1. All people desire to improve their world and maintain their own sense of dignity, always within the context of their own particular culture. Thus, a universal principle of intercultural communication should be to protect everyone's worth and dignity.
2. The second universal value is a world at peace. All ethical codes must recognize the importance of working toward a world in which people can live at peace with themselves and with one another.<sup>36</sup>

Ethical intercultural communicators continually struggle with the dilemmas presented by differences in cultural values. The tensions inherent in seeking to be tolerant of differences while holding firmly to one's own critical cultural values must always be reconciled. Kale's suggestions for responding ethically to cultural differences in values are excellent starting points for the internal dialogue that all competent intercultural communicators must conduct.

## 12.2.3: Do the Ends Justify the Means?

**OBJECTIVE:** Explain the dilemma of whether or not all intercultural contacts are positive and should be encouraged, in any circumstances

The final ethical dilemma we wish to raise concerns these questions:

- Should all intercultural contacts be encouraged?
- Are the outcomes of all intercultural contacts positive?

- Are all circumstances appropriate for intercultural contact?
- In short, do the ends justify the means?

We have been shamelessly enthusiastic about the potential benefits and delights of intercultural interaction. Nevertheless, certain outcomes may not necessarily be justified by the means used to obtain them.

As an ethical intercultural communicator, some of the following questions must be confronted:

- Is it ethical to go to another country, for whatever reason, if you are naïve and unprepared for cultural contact?
- Should intercultural contacts be encouraged for those who speak no language but their own?
- Should those who are prejudiced seek out intercultural contacts?
- Is it ethical to send missionaries to other countries?
- Is it acceptable to provide medical assistance to help a culture resist a disease, when in providing the assistance, you may destroy the very infrastructure and nature of the indigenous culture?
- Is it justifiable for the sojourner from one culture to encourage a person from another culture to disregard his or her own cultural values?

There are no simple answers to any of these questions, but the competent intercultural communicator must confront these ethical dilemmas.

## 12.2.4: Ethics—Your Choices

**OBJECTIVE:** Describe guiding principles for developing your own personal code of ethics

We have offered few specific answers to these ethical dilemmas because every person must provide his or her own response. In the context of your own experiences and your own intercultural interactions, you must resolve the ethical dilemmas that will inevitably occur in your life. Kale provides four principles to guide you as you develop your own personal code of ethics. Ethical communicators should do the following:

- Address people of other cultures with the same respect that the communicators would like to receive themselves.
- Try to describe the world as they perceive it as accurately as possible.
- Encourage people of other cultures to express themselves in their unique natures.
- Strive for identification with people of other cultures.

### WRITING PROMPT

#### Reflecting on Intercultural Ethics

Think about the ways in which your own cultural/personal ethics may conflict with that of another group. Discuss how society should navigate this issue of conflicting intercultural ethics in relation to the following questions: To what extent does one cultural group's ethics prevail, and under what conditions? To what extent must ethical decisions always be considered as a context that can vary?

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## 12.3: The Perils and Prospects for Intercultural Competence

Today's world is buffeted by an enormously powerful set of forces. Some of these forces are not unique to this era but have existed at other times throughout history. Some, however, are wholly new, and they are causing changes that are profound, unprecedented, and sometimes unpredictable.

What is most extraordinary about these forces is their confluence; never before has there been a convergence that is as omnipresent, pervasive, worldwide, instantaneous, and long-lasting as what we are now experiencing. From disastrous climactic disruptions to vast human dislocations and relocations; from heightened cultural enmities to increased cultural interdependencies; from declining populations and aging workforces (in Germany, Greece, Japan, and Russia) to rapidly increasing populations and the desire for more family-friendly social policies (in Canada, Egypt, India, and Kenya); and from events that often seem to occur at an exponential pace rather than at a linear one. Indeed, we are on the brink of a series of technological changes that some are calling the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which blurs the distinctions among physical, digital, and biological domains and thereby challenges the very foundations of our human-ness and cultural identities.<sup>37</sup>

### Culture Connections

As we embrace difference, we come to realize that while we are all "human beings," our way of *being* is in fact influenced by the cultural experiences that create our frames of reference and our beliefs. While the external trappings of this global world (dress, transport, homes, entertainment)

are increasingly the same, it becomes ever more important to value different points of view and ways of experiencing the world. Now, more than ever before, to be successful in our lives and our work as transnational leaders, we need to recognize the importance of diversity as a key factor for our success. Each of us must develop an awareness of the paradoxes that thwart our best intentions in communicating and working effectively with others. For it is in this awareness that trust and respect will flourish.

—Beth Fisher-Yoshida and Kathy D. Geller

What sense should we make of this "brave new world" of intercultural experiences? Fears and uncertainties may encourage people to evaluate others negatively based solely on such attributes as their physical appearance, choice of religious observance, culture of origin, and the like. But this newly emerging world may also encourage a healthy reevaluation of national priorities, the values inherent in a multicultural nation, and the means to achieving these desirable goals. That is, current events are fundamentally altering the basic and often unquestioned understandings that people have of their social worlds, and they raise issues such as the following:

- What does my culture and nation represent to others? That is, from the perspective of others who view us differently than we view ourselves, what does my culture and nation stand for?
- What are the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that seem to guide my culture's actions?
- In what ways am I interconnected with other cultures and economies in the world?
- To what extent should I trust people who seem different from me? To what extent *must* I trust people who seem different from me as a prerequisite for our mutual survival?

As you consider your personal response to these questions, we would like to describe two powerful yet opposing forces that affect every nation and culture, often in significant ways. The opposing forces could variously be described as engagement versus isolationism, globalism versus nationalism, secularism versus spiritualism, consumerism versus fundamentalism, or capitalism versus tribalism. That is, intercultural relationships among cultural groups throughout the world are simultaneously being pushed together and wrenched apart. Though the terminology to describe these potent forces may vary, and their influential consequences may fluctuate widely across cultures and regions of the world, they nevertheless provide us with powerful lenses through which to view the changing interrelationships among the world's cultures.

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- 12.3.1: Describe the cultural force that promotes engagement, globalism, secularism, and capitalism
- 12.3.2: Describe the cultural force that promotes isolationism, nationalism, spiritualism, and tribalism
- 12.3.3: Explain how the major forces shaping culture today impact intercultural communication

### 12.3.1: Forces That Push Us Together: Engagement, Globalism, Secularism, and Capitalism

**OBJECTIVE:** Describe the cultural force that promotes engagement, globalism, secularism, and capitalism

One such force—promoting engagement, globalism, secularism, and capitalism—is nurtured and sustained by the economic interdependence of today’s world. Economic interdependence, in turn, is linked to the rapid communications systems that now connect people virtually in real time, as events are displayed instantaneously through a variety of powerful technological innovations—television, film, videos, digital music, and the Internet. Transportation systems, as well, can quickly take people from one part of the globe to another, and tourism creates many opportunities to interact. Almost anywhere one travels, there will be familiar signs of the interdependent global economy: television shows such as *The Big Bang Theory*, *CSI*, *Modern Family*, and *American Idol* have burgeoning international audiences; film and musical performers, from K-pop to rap to salsa to classical, from Rihanna to the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, are known internationally; and YouTube videos are available globally. One can hear Peruvian musicians on a corner in Brussels, Beatles tunes in an elevator in Malaysia, reggae music on the streets of Guatemala City, and African rhythms at a park in San Francisco. In many parts of the world, the music played on the radio stations could be described, at least in part, as global and not representative of that country’s musical traditions.

Closely related to mass media’s impact is the speed of communications that now link much of the world. Events that occur in one country are displayed, within minutes, to people thousands of miles away. As a consequence, events in one part of the world have dramatic consequences in others. International telephone usage is on the rise; Skype, FaceTime, texting, and the Internet have drastically reduced the cost for such calls, which has made it much easier to communicate over long distances.

Added to all of these forces is the stark reality of global economic interdependence. There are obvious signs of this “sharing” of the world’s economy. The now-familiar KFC, Pizza Hut, and McDonald’s fast-food outlets are seemingly everywhere; Fords, Toyotas, and Volkswagens are driven the world over; and consumer products by Coca-Cola, Sony, Nestlé, and Bayer are marketed internationally. The world traveler could easily assume, incorrectly, that similarities in consumer products and media messages result from or will lead to a homogenization of world cultures.

### 12.3.2: Forces That Pull Us Apart: Isolationism, Nationalism, Spiritualism, and Tribalism

**OBJECTIVE:** Describe the cultural force that promotes isolationism, nationalism, spiritualism, and tribalism

A counterpoint to these forces for globalization is another, and equally powerful, set of constraints. These alternative influences—for isolationism, nationalism, spiritualism, and tribalism—derive from a desire to preserve, protect, and defend what is seen as unique but threatened: the culture’s language, religion, values, or way of life. As an example of these forces, consider the frequent desires expressed among members of some cultures to protect its language from the intrusions of other languages; France, for example, is very vigilant about keeping non-French words from the national language. Similarly, people may elect to safeguard their economies from foreign products; they may do this formally—with protectionist tariffs on goods from other nations, particularly if the foreign goods compete favorably with those locally grown or manufactured—or informally, by common consent—witness the dearth of Japanese-manufactured automobiles in Detroit, where major U.S. automakers are located. Cultures and nations may also attempt to protect their people from the “harmful” effects of the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices imposed on them from the “outside,” which might negatively influence people’s behaviors. Prohibitions of certain imported films, videos of artistic performances, and even Internet sites and search engines frequently occur in many places.

### 12.3.3: Culture’s Effect on “Push” and “Pull” Forces

**OBJECTIVE:** Explain how the major forces shaping culture today impact intercultural communication

There is no doubt that these two sets of forces are powerful and dynamic, and they will likely shape much of the

human experience throughout the twenty-first century. Discussions about these countervailing forces often come down to asking which forces are stronger: those promoting globalization and homogenization or those that encourage cultures to maintain their distinctiveness and unique ways of living.

We believe that what is missing from most discussions about the relative strengths of these forces is an understanding of the effects of culture on the human communication process. While these forces simultaneously push us together and pull us apart, what hasn't been acknowledged is that humans still bring their cultural backgrounds to their interpretations of these global events and symbols, which then shape the ways they make sense of them. That is, McDonald's arches, Jackie Chan's films, Jay-Z's music videos, Internet discussion board messages, and acts of "humanitarianism" are all interpreted and analyzed through individuals' differing cultural and national structures.

The patina of familiarity and commonality does not necessarily produce a shared understanding of the nature of everyday events. There is an important distinction between understanding and agreement in communication outcomes. The goal of living in a multicultural world, therefore, may sometimes mean that we must attempt to achieve understanding while recognizing that agreement may not always be likely, or even possible. Perhaps, however, we can sometimes "agree to disagree," with respect, civility, and caring. Intergroup tensions have characterized human interaction since the beginning of time, and they are not likely to abate soon. Stereotyping, we have suggested, is a natural and inevitable human tendency to categorize groups of others and thereby make the world more predictable. Our challenge is to assess individuals on their own merits, rather than merely as members of groups or nations, while simultaneously recognizing that humans typically identify and often react to their worlds as members of a culture.

Cultures and their symbolic systems also change over time. No culture is static. Even cultures that have minimal contact with the outside world are affected by changing ecological conditions and events, which in turn change how cultures experience and understand their own familiar worlds.

We suggest that both the forces promoting globalization and those encouraging individuation are mediated by the cultural patterns—the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices—of all peoples. Even identical messages, therefore, are often interpreted differently by those whose codes and cultures differ. Even identical media, such as Internet chat rooms, can encourage an understanding of oneself and others, or they can promote alienation and foster hate. In short, a genuinely intercultural global village is an alternative to the polarizing options of complete engagement

or total isolation. Thus, while we recognize the far-reaching effects of technological, societal, and economic forces, we must also remember that one's culture provides the meaning systems by which all messages are experienced and interpreted.

### WRITING PROMPT

#### Your Intercultural World

Reflect on the push and pull forces that constitute your intercultural world. Explain which forces seem to dominate the most—the push or the pull forces—and provide specific examples. Then explain whether you are personally more concerned with push or pull forces. What is your role as students of intercultural communication in navigating these push and pull forces?

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## 12.4: Concluding Remarks

We began this text with a sense of optimism but also with a deep concern about the pressing need for intercultural communication competence. Here in the twenty-first century, such competence is an essential attribute for personal survival, professional success, national harmony, and international peace. The challenge of living in a multicultural world is the need to transcend the unpredictability of intercultural interactions, to cope with the accompanying fears that such interactions often engender, and to feel joy and comfort in the discovery of cultural variability.

Our focus has been on the interpersonal hurdles—the person-to-person problems—that arise in coping with the realities of cultural diversity. We commend and encourage all who have struggled to adjust to the multicultural nature of the human landscape. Inclusion of others is the means to a better future, so we should be "widening our circle"<sup>38</sup> by acknowledging and celebrating cultural differences in all aspects of our lives. An intercultural mentality that matches this desire for a multicultural world will help to overcome the difficulties inherent in the quest, will bring a sense of excitement at the challenges, and will enhance the rewards of the successes.

We urge you to view this text and each intercultural experience as steps in a lifelong commitment to competence in intercultural communication. Intercultural competence is, in many ways, an art rather than a science. Our hope is that you will use your artistic talents to make the world a better place in which people from all cultures can live and thrive.